

## **Minutes of the Thames Valley Circuit Meeting held on Tuesday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 7.45 pm**

**This meeting was held on Zoom due to Covid 19 restrictions.**

*Note: CA – Church Action required.*

### **Welcome and opening devotions**

Vicci welcomed everyone to the meeting and led the opening devotions.

### **Membership of meeting and apologies for absence**

The membership of the meeting was agreed as recorded on the attendance list, and apologies for absence noted from Mrs Alison Mount and Mr Frank Bulley. 38 members were present.

### **Agreement of the agenda; notification of items requested for AOB**

No items were requested under AOB, and the previously circulated agenda was agreed.

### **Minutes of last meeting (as already circulated) and matters arising**

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as correct. There were no matters arising.

### **Receive reports already circulated**

The reports already circulated – *see below, Appendices 3 – 9* (Safeguarding, Local Preachers, Circuit Prayer Diary, Thames Valley Voices, Smaller Churches and Action for Children) were all received and accepted.

### **Finance**

Sue Le Page presented the budget for the church year 2021-2022, and brought a number of proposals to the meeting.

1 That the Circuit budget for the year to 31 August 2022 be for a total expenditure of £273,148 as shown on the budget schedule attached. Seconded by David Alexander. Carried.

2 Method of calculating the assessment: That this be changed to share between the churches according to their share of total unrestricted income shown in the accounts of the previous year, i.e. year end 31.8.2020 for 2021/22 assessment. Individual churches may then make extra offers to the Circuit, or request grants from the Circuit in exceptional circumstances. Seconded by Di Phipps. Carried.

3 Grants to individual churches towards their share of the 2021-22 Assessment: That the Circuit Meeting agree to grant High Street Methodist Church £16,695 and Old Windsor Methodist Church £2,342 reductions on their 2021-22 assessments in recognition of exceptional large repair bills. Seconded by Phil Mount. Carried.

4 2021-22 Assessment on Churches: That the total assessed on the churches be kept at the 2020-21 figure with the balance of £3,286 taken from Reserves and then a further net £15,520 be granted from Reserves to leave a total of £254,092 assessed on the Churches for 2021-22 as shown in the Assessment proposal attached. Seconded by Phil Mount. Carried.

5 That a letter is written on behalf of the Circuit Meeting to Nationwide Building Society citing the eligibility to claim the funds and the account details obtained from Kathryn Rickman, stating that she is the only one of the original signatories still a member, claiming the money on behalf of the Thames Valley Methodist Circuit, and giving our Circuit bank account details for payment. Seconded by Jane Short.

This fund, about to be closed by the Nationwide Building Society is left over from youth work done in the 1990s. Kathy, part of the original group, expressed the view that she would like the money to go specifically to youth work, in a special fund. Sue said that it was much simpler all round to put it into the Mission fund, from which any group could make a claim. The proposal was carried.

On the meeting's behalf, Vicci expressed our grateful thanks to Sue for all her hard work.

## News from the churches

Two churches in the circuit brought proposals about “Ceasing to Meet” to the meeting.

Ian, on behalf of Old Windsor, said that now our regular worshipping membership was down to 6, and all members elderly, they had very reluctantly taken this decision.

He proposed that subsequent to a unanimous vote by their Church Council on 25th February, 2021, the Methodist Society at Old Windsor cease to meet.

Kathy expressed her sorrow and surprise, and sent her greetings to the members at Old Windsor.

Ian proposed the resolution, and Glenice seconded it. Carried.

Anne E, on behalf of the Asian Congregation brought the proposal:

That subsequent to a unanimous vote by their church council on 18th February, 2021, the Asian Language Society at St Andrew's cease to meet as a separate congregation and become a fellowship group of the congregation currently referred to as St Andrew's (English Language Congregation) in Slough.

She said that it had been difficult to find and provide adequate Urdu-speakers to support the congregation, and that the majority of the members were now worshipping with the English speakers, as they were fluent in both languages.

Anne E proposed the resolution, and Dave Tottigham seconded it. Carried.

Vicci gave thanks for the congregations and members, and offered prayers and support.

## Matters from the CLT

Two documents from the CLT about future strategy were circulated in advance. The meeting split into small groups to discuss them. Vicci asked the groups to consider:

***If not this, then what? and If not now, then when?***

Discussion took place in the groups, with a summary presented in plenary, and further discussion after that.

*If not this, then what ...* produced positive reactions, with only one suggestion of anything different. There was enthusiasm for the idea, but some people felt that more detail was needed before wholesale support would be given. Others could already see possibilities. During the discussion:

- One member said “go ahead and do it”, and another “don’t delay”.
- Reservations included the high cost of the project, and the difficulties of a double decker bus going round narrow streets and under low bridges.
- Some wondered about half-way projects, eg minibus or caravan, but these were ruled out as not able to deliver the amount of inside space required.
- Several people asked about whether this had been tried elsewhere, and (when possible) could a visit be made to see the work.
- Some asked about working with other denominations.

### In summary:

Overall this way forward was met with enthusiasm, but more information is required, please!

*If not now, then when ...* produced a much wider range of views. Some wanted to start now; others felt we needed a fully worked out and costed project with all the details before we even began any further planning or consultation, with some suggesting a year to think and pray, prior to moving on.

*In whole meeting discussion*, Vicci stressed the need for collaborative working together, not merely consultative working. She said she would send Anne H links to others involved in this kind of work, which Anne would send to all members.

Some wanted to know more about the longer-term aims, eg where would we be in 5 years? What will be achieved by using money in this way? Others asked if there would be enough time in any of the places where the bus might go, to achieve anything.

Vicci felt that there is no spare time, and we need to start things going now.

The following proposals were put to the meeting:

- 1 That we commission a full scale costing exercise. Carried.
- 2 Without prejudice, the Circuit Meeting gives permission to start writing grant applications. Carried.

This is a step forward in faith.

### **News from District and Connexion**

The vote on the deferred special resolution was taken, and carried unanimously, 37 votes to 0.

### **Property**

Joy spoke on her behalf and Pauline's, to express their thanks that everyone had done the online returns so promptly, and requested the meeting to accept the online property return reports which are with the secretary and are now all complete. There are no major issues of concern.

Proposed by Joy, seconded by Christine Filmore. Carried.

Members expressed their grateful thanks to Joy.

### **Annual Circuit Appointments**

The following appointments were made:

- Children and Youth convenor – Elanor Davidson
- Circuit Property Secretary – Pauline Poole

Liz Tottingham was formally re-invited to be a Circuit Steward

Ian Haggarty was formally re-appointed as a representative to Synod.

Other appointments will come to the May meeting, including the membership of the Circuit Invitation Committee.

### **Circuit Greetings**

None

### **AOB**

None

### **Dates for Diaries**

Thurs 13 May 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	Zoom
Tues 14 Sep 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	
Wed 17 Nov 2021	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	
Thurs 17 Feb 2022	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	
Tues 17 May 2022	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	
Wed 14 Sep 2022	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	
Thurs 17 Nov 2022	Circuit Meeting	7.45 pm	

When it is possible to arrange actual Circuit Meetings, appropriate venues will be announced

Vicci closed the meeting at 9.47 pm, and we all blessed each other with the words of the Grace.

## **Appendix 1 Report from the CLT to Circuit Meeting – potential strategic way forward.**

### **Background to the thinking**

Over some years, the Circuit has been considering ways to move forward against a background of declining membership, church closure and aging congregations. Members of all churches have been working creatively and significantly within their communities through the offering of among other things, toddler groups, community lunches, Bible Studies and Open the Book. Yet some of our smaller churches are feeling overly stressed in terms of finance and personnel and it is likely that we will see four societies request to cease to meet over the coming year. Is there a way to release some of the pressure of keeping older buildings going, maintain a presence both where we are currently placed and in new places, while allowing our members to enjoy community, fellowship and the exercise of their gifts and passions?

This is a comprehensive, far-reaching and expensive strategy. It is designed to cover the issues that have been raised and the challenges that are apparent. It is not intended that Circuit Meeting respond to this document by saying “Yes,” or “No” but that members should engage with it, recommending the order, the priorities and other alternatives where appropriate. In so-doing, it is hoped that we will be able to articulate clearly the priorities of the circuit and then move towards outcomes that serve those priorities.

### **Finance**

Although there is currently some money in the Circuit reserves after the sale of Salt Hill Drive, the Circuit does not have a large pot to draw on. Particularly in the context of the COVID restrictions, several churches will have to tighten their belts to meet the assessment, and if things do not pick up as hoped, will not be able to pay next year’s. At least two churches require significant remedial work to be undertaken. Funding from local government is available for work among children, the elderly and to build community cohesion, and funding from the Methodist Church is available for work that is geared to grow our membership and increase our footprint in the community. Outreach, mission and evangelism are the focus of the current Connexional strategy.

### **Staffing**

Last year the Circuit saw a Deacon, a Superintendent Presbyterian and a Lay Pastor leave but only the Superintendent Presbyterian was replaced. Although the Lay Pastor role had been a two year contract, nevertheless there has been a significant reduction in staffed hours. The increased, legally mandated professionalisation of church work demanding more and more administratively of the members and the presbyters, continues to take up more time than is ideal and is often a burden or an obstacle to our members.

We want to maintain a presence in the villages where we have been placed, maintaining important relationships whilst also making new ones with people of all ages who have not found a faith home or have yet to hear the Good News at all.

### **A Proposal**

- To buy and refurbish to a very high standard, a double-decker bus which would have a quality soft-play children’s provision on the top deck and a coffee shop style lower deck, together with a retractable awning such that tables and chairs could also be placed outside the bus itself.
- The bus to be a “church on wheels” that would visit the communities where the Methodist society had ceased to meet once a week during the week to maintain an outreach presence and once a month on a Sunday to be the base for a café style worship service. This could also explore work elsewhere, for example on local estates, where we have not traditionally had a presence.
- This to be supported by a Deacon, or a Presbyterian with a heart for this sort of mission who would lead the work on the bus and a professional bus driver who would drive the bus and make tea etc.
- A team of at least two lay-workers who would assist all churches, including the bus, in community-facing work including mums and toddler groups, community coffee mornings etc. with their primary function to be the “muscle” freeing up local church members to engage with the community users.

If this was to be successful in growing membership, initially of the bus church, and also hopefully, through careful invitation and intentional development, of congregations in the remaining buildings, there would be an increased administrative workload and we might want to look at the case for employing more administrative support to release our church treasurers, property stewards and room hire officers as follows:

- To employ a finance administrator with appropriate experience to administer all finance across the circuit such that the church treasurers’ responsibilities are reduced.

- To employ a properties administrator with appropriate experience to administer all property matters, including room hire so that building and maintenance work is harmonised across the Circuit and cost-reductions are negotiated in respect of multiple jobs and bulk purchases.
- To maintain the current administrator role to assist in other administrative and compliance work required in the Circuit and to maintain a high-quality on-line presence in terms of websites etc.

Circuit Meeting will undoubtedly have questions about the practicalities of this proposal as well as its advisability. Much use has been made of the word “unprecedented” over the last year and rightly so. Perhaps it is time to meet unprecedented challenges with unprecedented answers. Circuit Meeting is invited to explore the potential for the proposals above to lead the way into a new and vibrant chapter for mission and ministry in the Thames Valley Circuit.

A rough estimation of the costs for such a project is appended to this report.

### **Potential costs – Circuit Strategy 2021**

Initial cost of bus: £50 000

Refurbishment: £100 000

Insurance, advertising, contingencies: £50 000

Bus driver salary (based on national average full-time): £24, 000

Lay workers’ salaries (assuming 40 per week at £14 p.h.): £24 120

Total costs in year 1: £248 120

Assuming the life time of all aspects of the above plan is ten years and the on-going running of the bus is £5000 p.a. then the entire cost would be in the region of £515 200. This disregards certain aspects (for example, the cost to the circuit for wages is not the same as the salary paid). The cost of the refurbishment and the bus is based on advice received from people in that field.

Members should note that money and membership would dictate that, were we to continue as we are, we would reduce the staffing of the circuit to three presbyters and the current circuit admin from the end of 21/22 connexional year. There would therefore be an additional cost of around £42 000 per annum to bring the staffing levels back up to four ordained ministers and we would almost certainly have to pay for this through capital receipts rather than assessment income. The meeting may want to explore a number of ways forward including having a "gap year" before doing this, or alternatively, only having one lay worker. The rationale for two is that we want to be able to support churches across the circuit who could do more mission and outreach with just a little bit more support.

Further lay worker hours, and/or the addition of the proposed administrative support would clearly cost more. Doubling layworker hours and employing the equivalent of one full-time administrative role at £30 000 per annum would add an addition £54 120 per annum or £541 200 over a ten-year period. The case for this would be based on increased membership and workload and would have to be considered on a business basis.

### **Potential income:**

This starts to move into the realm of “guessology” but that said and making certain assumptions based on disposal of three smaller chapel buildings, I think we are looking at capital of between £1 042 700 and £1 242 700 from sale of property not yet considered (i.e. disregarding the additional funds from the sale of Salt Hill) and a potential income from the bus of £15 000 pa (based on 150 people per week paying an average of £2.50 per session) plus £8000 per annum (based on rental of the bus at £200 per session for 40 sessions a year). This gives a potential income of £23 000 and does not consider donations, giving or grant funding.

Assuming therefore the minimum potential sale of three churches plus a potential income of £230 000 over a 10 year period, we would be balancing incoming funds of £1 272 700 as against outgoing funds of £515 200 rising to £1 056 400 in a ten year period should we move to an 80 hour per week of lay worker time and a full time equivalency of administrative staff.

### **Potential for Grants**

The “God for All” report to the Conference of 2020 recognised the need to fund outreach projects which were specifically geared towards church-planting, evangelism and growth. Initial conversations of the “would you be

interested if we...?" variety have been favourably received at both District and Connexional level. TMCP has also indicated that there would be no legal impediment. I would stress that all conversations to this point have been hypothetical, but my sense based on what has been said, is that it would be possible to secure some funding, particularly where the Circuit was seen to be prepared to invest significantly in the project.

More work is required for a full costing exercise to properly inform decision-making. This initial report is designed to show that the project, while costly in scope, is potentially capable of being funded even if we are unable to attract the support of grant-making bodies. I would therefore recommend that, should Circuit Meeting decide to go ahead with the project, we commission a formal costing exercise, taking care to start with what is doable, but that we ensure sufficient investment to maintain a very high quality provision. I have been offered an initial donation of £520 from outside the Circuit towards such an exercise should Circuit Meeting wish to pursue this.

V Davidson March 2021

## **Appendix 2 Circuit Treasurer's Report to Thames Valley Methodist Circuit Meeting March 2021**

The Circuit Accounts for the year to 31 August 2020 were signed off by the external examiner with the figures unchanged on 3 December 2020 and have been lodged with the Charity Commission.

£174,145.88 was credited to the Circuit Model Trust Fund with TMCP from the sale of the Salt Hill Manse after paying off the bridging loan in full. An application to TMCP has been made to release £25,350 of this to the Circuit to cover the costs incurred on sale of manse, and costs of repair and maintenance of manses, and cost of employing a lay worker for the three months Sept to Nov 2020.

The budget for 2021-22 is shown on the attached schedule together with the expected outcome for the year to 31 August 2021. Also attached are the notes to this and the proposed assessment on the Churches for 2021-22.

These figures were presented to the meeting of Church Treasurers in January to be brought to the individual church councils together with a pie chart of the costs that the Circuit incurs.

The Treasurers' meeting recommended a simplification from the current calculation of the assessment based on income from collections, income from lettings, and membership to a straight calculation according to each church's share of total unrestricted income as shown in the last accounts and therefore based on actual income already received. This took no account of exceptional expenses incurred and so churches were encouraged to offer support or submit requests for grant reductions to the Circuit Meeting.

Proposals for the Circuit Meeting:-

- 1. 2021-22 Budget: That the Circuit budget for the year to 31 August 2022 be for a total expenditure of £273,148 as shown on the budget schedule attached.**
- 2. Method of calculating the assessment: That this be changed to share between the churches according to their share of total unrestricted income shown in the accounts of the previous year, i.e. year end 31.8.2020 for 2021/22 assessment. Individual churches may then make extra offers to the Circuit, or request grants from the Circuit in exceptional circumstances.**
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Sue Le Page Circuit Treasurer, 28 February 2021



## **Appendix 3 Local Preachers Report**

1. Worship has been very different during the past year owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have discovered new ways of communicating with each other and of worshipping God. We are thankful to Vicci and the Circuit Team for bringing us together at the on-line ZOOM services and to those who have provided technical expertise to live stream some services.
2. Worship Leaders have joined together with preachers at our recent meetings. At our December meeting we shared together thoughts, prayers, poems appropriate for the Advent season. In March Rev Anne Ellis introduced Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the EDI Toolkit.
3. The main responsibilities of the Meeting are oversight and continuing development. This puts a strong emphasis on training for all—none of us is the finished article! We plan to hold an Awayday at the end of September subject to finding a suitable venue.
4. At the time of writing, many of our churches remain closed for worship but are reviewing re-opening. We are conscious that face-to-face services will look and feel quite different, but we rejoice in being able to gather together for worship once more. As a Circuit, we will operate a ‘blended’ approach and positively provide accessible points of entry for as many as possible.
5. We have two ‘trainee’ preachers, Josh Wilson who is ‘on trial’ and Mwadzipaura Magaisa who is ‘on note’. We hold them in our prayers as they progress in their studies and preaching. Elijah Kommu has made a difficult decision to cease training and offer as a Worship Leader. We pray also for him.
6. Elanor Davidson has offered as a Worship Leader at Windsor Methodist church, and together with Elijah has embarked on the Worship: Foundations Course led by Anne Haggarty.
7. We hold in our prayers and assure of our support those preachers who are no longer able to preach and lead worship.

David Ridley

Local Preachers’ Meeting Secretary, March 2021

## **Appendix 4 Safeguarding Report for the Circuit Meeting**

During this lock down, training has been offered by the District, on Zoom, for different aspects of safeguarding including Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, Domestic Violence and Online Safety which was a very comprehensive session. Pauline Poole and I also participated in ‘Demystifying DBS checks and I attended an informative session on Dementia, Pathways to Care on which I am happy to advise. We all have handouts with information that we are happy to share if relevant to your situation.

Glenice White, Jenny Sturgeon, Gill Harbut and I have now completed the training for trainers in respect of the updated Foundation Module and we are ready to roll this out on 19<sup>th</sup> June. We have no further information about when the Advanced Module will be available for those who are required to attend. Both the Foundation and Advanced Module trainings will be available online and I will forward any dates I am given. There continues to be an extension of the period before training needs to be updated.

As we open up our church premises we all need to be mindful of the effect this pandemic has had on different members of our communities and be aware of the pastoral issues that may have arisen. It is a timely reminder that safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility and that there are vulnerable children, adults and indeed families amongst our congregations. It is also timely to remind everyone that we need to keep ourselves and each other safe by following good practice guidance, and that any concerns, however minor they might seem, should be shared with the right person. In most cases this will be the Minister and/or the Church Safeguarding officer who will know where to take your concerns.

The Circuit Safeguarding Policy is due to be reviewed in May and Vicci and I have decided to wait until the next Circuit Meeting to do this as there are changes in the updated Connexion Model Circuit Safeguarding Policy. Between now and then the Presbyters and I will also be formulating a new Social Media and Communication Policy in line with that of the Connexion to present to the meeting.

Kathy Rickman, Circuit Safeguarding Officer 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## **Appendix 5 Property Report to the Circuit Meeting – March 2021**

### **On line Property Returns/Schedules:**

All property returns have now been completed. Thanks to everyone for completing them so promptly.

### **Quinquennials**

These are up to date at present but just to remind property stewards that it is their responsibility to contact Neil Barr to arrange them when due.

### **Manse Reports**

Some repairs and updating have been carried out in the past year but in the main our 4 manses are in good order.

**Clarence Road:** replacement windows to the front bays will be put off until we are in a better position and at Margaret's request, will not happen until she steps down. The rear bedroom window was been replaced on 5<sup>th</sup> March, the painting of this remaining exterior sill will be painted asap. The quinquennial highlighted some new cracking in the internal walls which will need monitoring.

**Sutton Avenue:** The fencing has been replaced and now is in good order. There remains some minor works to be completed internally such as painting.

**Poplar Grove:** I know of no work outstanding.

**Spring Lane:** Treatment for the removal of Japanese knotweed has commenced and there have been some repairs to parts of the fencing.

**SALT HILL:** Has now been sold

### **Property Consents**

There are at present no consents registered.

I request the meeting to accept the online property return reports which are with the secretary and are now all complete? There are no major issues of concern.

Joy Brown                      March 2021

## **Appendix 6 Circuit News from Action for Children**

The circuit magic show held on 19.12.20 had a just giving page for Action for Children set up in time for the event to raise £733 and was a great success.

We held our meeting postponed from 18.3.2020 on 1.12.2020 via zoom and there was a financial update on funds raised by some churches within the circuit. Not all churches have a representative and so information will be circulated to their senior church steward for circulation.

The representative from the charity explained that they had managed to support 38,648 children last year and celebrated their 150<sup>th</sup> year with garden parties, quizzes & bake sales. This allowed them to provide emergency funds and respond to needs of children and families through the pandemic. They provided 10,000 food parcels, helped pay utility bills and supported education.

Jane Rivett **16.2.2021**

## **Appendix 7 Thames Valley Voices**

Nothing to report as we have been unable to meet together since this time last year. As soon as we are able to meet, I shall be asking choir members to come along. A couple of times during the last year, I have emailed members, if only to indicate that we are still hoping to get together again.

Anne Haggarty



## **Appendix 8      Circuit Prayer Diary**

I have not asked church contacts to provide prayers for this current quarter (March – May) as it has proved difficult to for them to produce prayers which may not be quite relevant when their date comes. I do thank all my contacts who have continued to write the short, relevant prayers for the diary.

I am happy to keep on producing the Diary, but would like some feedback about how it is being used. I should also be very happy to receive any thoughts people may have about its use, its content and anything else that might be helpful. The one specific constraint is that everything for the quarter has to fit on to two sides of A4, so there is a discipline of short prayers.

Please let me have your thoughts and suggestions before the next Circuit Meeting, 13<sup>th</sup> May.

Anne Haggarty

## **Appendix 9      Smaller Churches Group**

This group has continued to meet by Zoom, and continues to support everyone and think ahead about activities which will become possible after lockdown and other restrictions are lifted. We have another meeting planned for the end of the month, after the next lockdown easing has been confirmed.

Anne Haggarty